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STATINTL

Fulbright Is Critical of U.S.I.A. For Flying Newsmen to Vietnam

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Special to The New York Times

WASHINGTON, Aug. 17—Senator J. W. Fulbright suggested today that newspapers and correspondents who accepted Government transportation to Vietnam might be in a conflict of interest with their readers.

Mr. Fulbright, chairman of the Foreign Relations Committee, raised the question during a hearing at which Leonard H. Marks, director of the United States Information Agency, testified. Mr. Marks was questioned about the advisability and propriety of the agency's payment for the transportation of 30 to 35 European and Asian correspondents who visited Vietnam during the last year.

Senator Fulbright pointed out that The Toronto Star and The Globe and Mail of Toronto, two of Canada's leading newspapers, had refused the information agency's offer of free transportation, and he asked Mr. Marks why. Mr. Marks said he did not know and would ask the head of the agency in Canada.

Selection Process Criticized

Senator Fulbright, Democrat of Arkansas, and other members of his committee, including Senator Albert Gore, Democrat of Tennessee, suggested that the correspondents who made the free trips had been chosen because the agency hoped their reports would counterbalance the unfavorable and frequently hostile views in many countries about United States military activities in Vietnam. The Senators contended that the selection process indicated that this was the intention.

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Mr. Marks rejected the suggestion. He argued that many European and Asian newspapers could not afford to send correspondents to Vietnam and that it was the agency's hope that once in the area the reporters would determine the facts for themselves and report accordingly.

Senator Fulbright, as well as Senator Eugene J. McCarthy, Democrat of Minnesota, and Senator Clifford P. Case Republican of New Jersey, pressed Mr. Marks on the problem as a whole and the refusal of the Canadian newspapers in particular.

Mr. Fulbright added: "doesn't this point to a possible conflict of interest that might compromise the objectivity newspapers owe their readers?"

When Mr. Marks asserted repeatedly that the information agency did not operate within the United States and did not transport American reporters to Vietnam, Senator McCarthy said that The Washington Post had declined Pentagon offers of transportation to Vietnam — a practice followed by other newspapers, including the New York Times — and he asked Mr. Marks if he could explain this.

He replied that he did not know, but assumed that The Washington Post was a rich newspaper and could afford to pay for transportation.

Senator Fulbright asked whether there might be a reason other than money to explain The Washington Post's refusal to accept free transportation.

Mr. Marks repeated his assertion that the newspaper's policy could be explained by its wealth. Mr. Fulbright's rejoinder implied that the newspaper was motivated by the wish to protect its readers from a conflict of interest that would compromise the objectivity of its correspondents.

In defense of his program, Mr. Marks insisted that the correspondents his agency transported could report on any events they wished and were given all the facilities available to the information agency. Mr. Marks said that the agency was interested only in obective reporting of facts and recognized that reporters might have opinions.

In this connection, Mr. Marks waved copies of articles on the same subject published in The New York Times and The Washington Post to illustrate his contention that two reputable reporters could report the same facts in different ways.

The dispatches, from Tokyo, reported former Ambassador Edwin O. Reischauer's opinions about the Vietnam situation. The headline on The Washington Post dispatch, published Aug. 11, read: "Reischauer Backs U.S. Viet Policy." The dispatch published Aug. 10 in The Times, an Associated Press report, appeared under the headline "Reischauer Critical of Vietnam Policy."

In the dispatches, which reported an interview with Mr. Reischauer in Tokyo, the departing Ambassador said that the United States must find a better way to handle the Vietnamese problem, based on local nationalism and broader international support. He asserted that though he supported and would continue to support United States policy in Vietnam, the situation there was not satisfactory.

Associated Press Wirephoto

Leonard H. Marks, the U.S. Information Agency head, before Senate committee.

Mr. Fulbright asserted that he had read the two dispatches, and despite their different headlines, they were not far apart in reporting Mr. Reischauer's views.

Senator Case suggested that the agency might deal with the propriety of paying foreign reporters' costs by changing its selection method.

He urged funds be offered to newspaper and journalist associations or governments to select the reporters. Mr. Marks did not accept the suggestion.

Mr. Marks was also pressed to express an opinion on whether the American "image" was improving in Asia. He replied that there was some evidence to indicate that opinion on the United States in Vietnam was beginning to change, but that he could not say that the tide had turned.

He asserted that the agency was doing an effective job, frequently against great odds and in a hostile atmosphere.

He repeatedly emphasized that the information agency in Vietnam was solely concerned with civilian affairs.

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